

## **Stitching a Layered Faith**

*Nuanced, surprising, and beautiful, Unitarian Universalism joins together myriad sources and experiences.*

The layers go deeper than the consolidation of two American religious traditions. Theological Unitarianism from the radical Reformation in Eastern Europe meets eighteenth-century King's Chapel in Boston. From John Murray at the Universalist Church of America to Swami Vivekananda at the World's Parliament of Religions, Christians, Humanists, Atheists, Jews, Pagans, Buddhists, and Muslims. Spiritual refugees and life-long UUs with multigeneration family history. University scholars, ordained ministers, chaplains, and lay leaders. Religious educators, administrators, and music ministers. Unitarian Universalism is not, as some may quip, a place where we can believe anything we want. It is a place to approach our growth as spiritual people with openness and curiosity, a place where multiple beliefs, multiple traditions, and multiple life experiences will inform our search. In community, we piece together a faith that seeks to make sense of the world and empowers us to create change. Here are a few voices from our magnificent patchwork quilt.

*Janice Marie Johnson*

I am a child of Jamaica, home to churches, temples, synagogues, and many other communities of worship. When I was a child, my family encouraged me to ask questions about everything around me: about God, Rastafarianism, the virgin birth, Catholicism, Jesus, sin, Judaism, and much more. Unlike my Sunday school teachers, my parents offered expansive answers and more questions for collective contemplation.

At home, I grew up with the undeniable success of reggae, which crossed borders of class, matters of conscience, and religion. Rastafarianism, the dominant religion of early reggae musicians, was often shunned by the Jamaican elite, but things were changing. My family developed dear friendships with reggae and Rastafarian musical families, including the Marleys. To this day, I consider my Rastafarian "bredda," Peter Tosh, to be a modern-day prophet. In his song "Equal Rights," he urges us to strive to attain equal rights with justice, to honor our ancestors and ourselves. His prayer is my prayer for our faith, for our fragile world, for all the generations.

I was blessed to grow up knowing that "Children should be seen *and* heard." It is reminiscent of the UU message "The answer is to question." Our voices matter. They are sacred. For this I give thanks.

*Rev. James Ishmael Ford*

The single most powerful source for my spiritual life has been silence. Discovering the place between words and ideas, tasting it, smelling it, listening to it, has opened me to the rhythms of life and death and to the heart of love.

I have a formal practice that invites the silence. Over the years, finding regular times to just sit with it has been critical. Taking a few days or even a week to sit with others in a practice centered on silence has been life-giving. I've taken up this opportunity several times every year for many decades now. These days as I age, finding it in less formal settings, on a walk, just sitting in a chair, in a moment when I set my book down, has been a constant reminder.

Silence tells me where I come from. It points me to where I will go. And it runs a wild current through my life today. Silence still informs my understanding of how we all of us rise and fall within rhythms at once subtle and larger than my imaginings. It shows me how I am connected to the rest of my human family and to the larger family of things.

I notice it as I inhale. I notice it as I exhale. I notice it in the turns, in and out.

My words, feeble things in general, attempt to recall what I've learned in those silent spaces where the universes are revealed. Sometimes I succeed.

These words birthed in silence, I've found, point to the great healing.

*Rev. Abhi Janamanchi*

Growing up in a Hindu household, some of my earliest experiences of devotion were shaped by watching my grandmother every morning, after her bath, chanting Sanskrit mantras in front of the family shrine. She embodied the Hindu idea that the spiritual journey is deeply personal, between oneself and the Holy, and that each person must find and follow their own path.

This foundational belief led me to embrace Unitarian Universalism alongside my Hindu faith, becoming a Unitarian Universalist-Hindu (UU-Hindu).

My UU-Hindu faith affirms that underlying and animating the human self is a reservoir of being that is infinite, all-pervading, and ultimate truth-consciousness-joy (*sat-chit-ananda*), known as Brahman. This infinite Brahman is present in all beings, creating a profound interconnectedness.

My UU-Hindu faith is expressed through a deep reverence for life and promotes the interdependence of all existence. It is grounded in the core ethical values of *ahimsa* (non-injury) and *daya* (compassion), which guide my actions and interactions with others.

My UU-Hindu faith focuses on life before death. It encourages continual awakening from inertia to fully engage with the world. It promotes a way of being that is characterized by liberation from greed and a deep affirmation of abundance and generosity.

My UU-Hindu faith upholds the inherent worthiness, dignity, and divinity of all beings. It rejects any social, cultural, religious, or political systems founded on inequity and injustice, advocating instead for justice, equity, and liberation for all.

My UU-Hindu faith teaches personal responsibility and accountability, reminding me that the consequences of our actions extend far beyond our individual lives.

To be a UU-Hindu is to do the daily work of investing my time, gifts, and life in service of a Life larger than my own. It is a path that integrates the wisdom and spiritual depth of Hinduism with the inclusive, justice-oriented values of Unitarian Universalism, creating a holistic and engaged spiritual practice.

*Rev. Amanda Poppei*

When it comes down to it, my faith comes from the amazing, against-all-odds, courageous, beautiful resilience of the human heart: the way people find joy after grief, courage after fear, liberation after oppression. I never fail to be awestruck by those stories. But every faith needs a wellspring, a source, that can be continually renewed—and that’s why I read romance novels. No, really. This minister is telling you to read romance novels—well, if they help you remember that love is always possible. Or to watch children’s fairytale movies, which so often have at their heart a message of redemption after mistakes. Or to collect the stories around you, the heroes or resistance in a broken world, who keep on fighting for love or simply surviving even when the system seems (is) stacked against them.

So often we imagine that our moments of spiritual insight have to come from the “right” kinds of places, from beautiful poetry or the woods. And listen, I love poetry! And the woods! But what I want to say today is that the spiritual is all around us, that our faith can be replenished in the silly, the sexy, the sacred: that these may just be one and the same. I once knew someone who found themselves in a deep valley of sadness, struggling to understand how to continue forward. They found their way out through episodes of *Care Bears*. So be exuberant with your faith-searching! Allow wisdom from every source! Perhaps, like me, you’ll find a reminder of the heart’s resilience in the least likely of places.

*This pamphlet is adapted from “Multiple Voices, One Faith,” originally published in UUWorld (uuworld.org), May 1, 2022.*

***For Further Reading***

These Skinner House Books titles are available from the inSpirit UU Book and Gift Shop at [uua.org/bookstore](http://uua.org/bookstore).

Sofía Betancourt, ed. *Love at the Center: Unitarian Universalist Theologies*

Susan Katz Miller, *The Interfaith Family Journal*

*Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide*

Unitarian Universalist Association, 24 Farnsworth St., Boston, MA 02210-1409

[uua.org](http://uua.org)

Item 3155